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THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN CURBING SOCIAL PROBLEMS AMONG THE YOUTH; AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Social problems involving the youth is a global challenge that has attracted and continues to attract the attention of everybody, irrespective of their faith, geographical location, level of development and status. Although this problem has reached an alarming situation, there are yet sufficient studies suggesting Islamic comprehensive measures in curbing them. The descriptive, analytical and synthetic approach will be adopted which is mainly interpretative in the form of textual commentary. The study will begin by defining what a social problem is as conceived by educationists, emphasizing the Islamic view. The study will then assess the intensity of the problem from selected sample studies so far carried out, critically looking at the approaches and solutions thus far suggested in curbing these problems. The discussion will finally present an assessment of the Islamic teaching based on the Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him) how these social problems involving the youth should be remedied, critically putting more emphasis on the recommendation of contemporary Muslim scholars.

Keywords: Social problem, Youth, Islamic view, Approaches, Contemporary Muslim scholars

INTRODUCTION

The future of any community in any society in the world is very much based on the young generation of that particular community. This therefore necessitates much care about the young

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generation in terms of bringing it up in an upright manner and in upholding the values on which the behaviours of that society are judged. On this Abud and Abdul Ali,(1990), assert that the future of the society to a greater extent is determined by the educational circumstances exposed to the children, whereby giving more attention to children means giving attention to the future of the whole community. If the young generation receives appropriate education and it continues in that direction, without doubt the boat of a nation will have a successful journey. The children in the real sense of the matter are the reflection of the society - any society-through them a society can predict its future. This means that, the pillars of the system of the old people were generally laid during their early years of childhood”.

Clark and Starr (1981) observe that between the ages of 10 and 18 the range of the middle and secondary school years - boys and girls move from childhood to young adulthood. The lives of teenagers who are middle and secondary school students are full of complexities and enigmas. The business of growing up is a complicated one. Adolescents are torn by many conflicts and many moments of indecision. At one moment they may demand complete independence at the next moment, they may need the protection required by young children. As they enter early adolescence they encounter personal, social, educational and vocational problems they are incapable of analysing and logically solving. Often their lives are stormy. Clark and Starr further stress that the teacher should understand the reasons for an adolescent's behaviour in order to help them during this trying period, by being aware of factors that contribute to many of the changes in behaviour taking place. The early adolescent, now more confused by the mysteries of physiological and concerned over the development of secondary sex characteristics and new social and emotional pressures, need strong support, not only from home, but from school as well. Therefore, in order for the teacher to be able to diagnose the teaching-learning situation accurately and formulate effective teaching strategies, they must be familiar with the characteristics of pupils in general and their own individual pupils in particular.

Definition of a social problem from educational -sociological perspective

The term Social Problems is defined through different sociological perspectives; hence, “books on social problems typically state that no adequate definition of social problems exists....” (Henley, 1986). According to. (Davis, n.d.), social problems result from social pathology, disruption, or a social “sickness” or social “instability” of persons, groups, or institutions, which then negatively affects the societal organism as a whole. The source of social problems is embedded in the exploitative behavior of the dominant group, and results in inequality, racism, and sexism, etc, if someone or some group is suffering or placed in a disadvantageous position; there must be some other group that is more powerful that benefits from the misery of the disadvantaged group (Farley, 2000 cited in Long 2007).

Social problems are not the result of an intrinsic malfunction of society, but are a result of a process of definition in which a given condition is picked out and identified as a social problem. A social problem does not exist for a society unless it is recognized by that society; usually by influential members to exist” (Blumer, 1971). Social problems are definitions constructed by members of a society, and these constructions are expressions of value judgments. The causes of the condition, or variations in the condition, are entirely different from the causes of the definition or variations in the definition” (Spector and Kitsuse, 1977) “Different groups that are in contact hold different cherished values or interests and engage in activities that defend or enhance these values, such as labeling groups with different values from their own as social problems. Spector and Kitsuse in *Constructing Social Problems* (1977), “propose a definition of social problems not as conditions, or definition of conditions, but as activities, claims-making activities: the activities of individuals or groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative conditions” (Henley, 1986). According to this definition, values are not to be studied as ‘causes’ of social problems, but are simply one of the resources that members use in their efforts to define conditions as social problems; they are part of the phenomenon to be described and explained, along with such concepts as motives and interests...”(Henley, 1986). Some conditions or claims become dominant while others go unheard and un-remedied. Discourse creates conditions as problems and constructs the way we think about issues” (Davis, n.d.)

According to the Malaysian Crime Prevention Foundation (Yaya`san Pencegahan Jenayah Malaysia), the crimes committed by the youth include; housebreaking, robbery, motor vehicle theft, pickpocket, outrage modesty and youth crime. It is apparent from the preceding that there is no universally agreed upon definition of a social problem, thus, it is based on the concept of unfixed values, because what seems to be a social problem to one community it is not to another.

The Islamic perspective

On the other hand, Islam is a religion of fixed values with standardized moral ethics based on the *Quran* and *Sunnah*, thus social ills in the Islamic tradition are uniform to all Muslims, irrespective of their geographical location, race, level of development and period. Islam uses the word “*akhlaq*” which is a general term covering good morals as well as bad morals. Thus, Muslim scholars depending on the Islamic *Shariah* and intellect divided human behavior into two major divisions; *Akhlaq mahamudah*, praise-worthy behaviors; morals which lead to the happiness in the earthly life of an individual as well as the life after death. The second type is known as *akhlaq mazmumah*, the un praise-worthy behaviors which includes all immoral activities and behaviors which will eventually lead the individual to destruction in this life and

the life after death (Abdullah *et al.*, 2007). The social ills from the sociological perspective can be placed under this category. However, it is crucial to note that the sociological view of social ills is based only on people's intellect and judgment unlike the Islamic teaching which is based on Islamic *Shariah*.

The Muslim scholars define the term *Ahklaq* (morality) in various ways, however, the current study will define it in Quranic terms. According to Miskawaih, character or (*khulq*) is a state or (*haal*) of the soul which enables it to perform its actions without any reflection or deliberation (Ansar 1964).

The Arabic word *ahklaq* (character) is a plural word whose singular is *khulq* (behavior). This word is mentioned in the Quran, Allah the Almighty says; "*And indeed, you are of a great moral character*" (*Surah al-Qalam*, 68:4). The word *khulq* in the above verse refers to specific inborn human behavior. The morals mentioned in the Quran constitute the most excellent morals. Morality in Islam is characterized by universality, whereby it covers all aspects of life; economic, political, social and education, based on the relation between Allah the Almighty, the Creator and human beings and between human beings and other human beings and between human beings and the universe (Abdullah, 2007).

Thus, Ansar (1964) observes that the *Quran* and *Sunnah* provide the definite principles of morality. However, morality and good conduct according to al-Ghazali are not possible without knowledge (Umaruddin, 2003). Rahman (1995) explains that, the spiritual discipline which educates and trains the inner self of man is the core of the Islamic system. The Islamic concept of morality is based on certain basic beliefs; the doctrine of *Tawhid*; God is the Creator, Master and Sovereign to the entire universe, and all truth, goodness and beauty spring from Him. Thus, Islam not only provides a normal standard but also furnishes man with a means of determining good and evil conduct, it does not base human knowledge of vice and virtues on mere intellect, desire, institution, or experience derived through sense-organs, which constantly undergo shifts and modifications and alterations and do not provide categorical and unchanging standards of morality.

Islam is a religion of good morals; it preaches and empathizes its inculcation in the souls of its adherents. Allah the Almighty praised his Prophet in the *Quran* thus "*And indeed, you are of a great moral character.*" (*Surah al-Qalam*, 68:4). The Almighty Allah made the good morals the means of achieving the highest levels of Paradise. Allah the Almighty says in *Ali-Imran* 3:133-134 "*And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and a garden as wide as the heavens and earth, prepared for the righteous. Who spend [in the cause of Allah] during ease and hardship and*

who restrain anger and who pardon the people - and Allah loves the doers of good” The *Quran* further states (*Quran Surat Fussilat* 41:34-35) “*And not equal are the good deed and the bad. Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better; and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend.*” The Prophet (pbuh) too emphasized good moral when he said “*Fear Allah whenever you may be and follow the bad deeds with good deeds and treat people with good morals*” (narrated by al-Tirmizi).

Consequently, it is upon every Muslim to adapt good morals and imitate the Prophet (pbuh) who had the highest moral standards which were a reflection of the *Quran* as reported by Aisha (ra) when answering a question of what was the Prophet’s behavior, to which she answered “*his behavior was a reflection of the Quran*” (Sahih Muslim). In another Hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah the Prophet (pbuh) was asked about what will mostly lead people to Paradise, he replied “*fear of Allah the Almighty and good conduct*” and he was again questioned about what will mostly lead people to Hell fire to which he replied “*the mouth and the private parts*” (narrated by al-Tirmizi).

It is narrated by Abu Hurairah that the Prophet peace be upon him said “*the most perfect of all the believers is the one with the best morals*” (narrated by Abu Daud). Jabir narrates that the Prophet peace be upon him said that “*the most beloved and nearest amongst you to me on the Day of Judgment, is the one with the best moral*” (narrated by al-Tirmizi). Consequently, “the Prophet peace be upon him had the highest morality” (narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim). Thus, Abu Hurairah narrated that the Prophet is said to have emphasized the gist of his mission as nothing but to perfect upright moral. He said” *I was indeed commissioned to perfect good morals*”

Review of selected samples of studies so far carried out critically looking at solutions suggested and their weaknesses

A number of studies have been carried out on social ills in various parts of the world due to the intensity and seriousness of this problem. Huge budgets have been allocated to fight this problem and to find lasting solutions. However, different countries with different experiences are yet to agree even at the level of what a social ill constitutes and what could be the best approaches in curbing or stopping this menace.

Jeffrey *et al.* (2001), observe in their study that the prevention of juvenile delinquency and proper handling of young offenders have been critical social policy issues in the United States for the past one hundred years. A variety of diverse policies and programs have targeted youth crimes since the inception of the American juvenile court in 1899. Jensen and others further

explain that in spite of the efforts policy makers and practitioners; juvenile crime persists as one of the country's pressing and intractable social problems. Jensen and others continue to emphasize that the consequences of juvenile offending in America and elsewhere are well known, children who initiate anti-social behavior at an early age are at significantly increased risk for serious and violent off ending during adolescence. Jensen and others concluded that solutions to delinquency like those for all complex human problems are not easily found. There is little consensus among elected officials or the public at large about the most effective way to curb delinquency conduct.

Abdu Wahab bin Kassim (nd) in his study focused on social problems particularly criminal misconduct among adolescents who were under remand in prison in Malaysia. Abdul Wahab observes that the nation has long been plagued by juvenile delinquency, although much has been said and debated, the issue has not received much attention. The problem of juvenile is said to be on rise from time to time, the actual number is estimated to be higher than that reported. Abdul Wahab is of the view that social deviance among juveniles starts at school age. At the initial stage, this delinquency is a form of abuse of school rules such as truancy, smoking and vandalism. Abdul Wahab further adds that the absence of effective measures to curb and overcome this problem is a catalyst to more serious criminal misconducts such as bullying, injury to others, rape, theft and murder. Abdul Wahab concludes by suggesting that effective preventive measure must be implemented in an integrated and wide spread manner at the family and community levels, school and rehabilitation institutions.

According to Jones (2008) the high street in South London has experienced a crime wave in recent years. Armed gangs of young people have killed hundreds of people in an orgy of violence, apparently prompted by their involvement with drugs. Ismail Ahmad (2012) in his study explains that Juvenile delinquency is a long-standing problem which has existed for the past few decades, has adverse impact on social, capital and human resource development. Therefore, his study was identifying the factors that lead to immoral acts among teenagers. The study's main objectives were to determine the level of delinquency by looking at the level of education, socio-economy and family relationship, and the perception of the delinquents themselves, in order to explore the factors that contribute to juvenile delinquency. This study used a questionnaire survey which includes a structured close-ended questionnaire with a nominal scale of 1 to 7. The study had two parts; demographic profile while part 2 consisted of three categories encompassing Education, Socio-Economy and Family Relationship. The study found out that socio-economic matters; family relationship and level of education are significant factors in explaining juvenile delinquency. At the same time, the findings also indicated that socio-economic reason and family relationship are the main factors that contribute to crimes

involving juveniles in the country. Implication from this study points to the need for continuous prevention actions and commitment from many parties in order to curb the problem. It requires full commitment of the government, NGOs, enforcement officers and involvement of the society as a whole, apart from the police department. Ismail Ahmad notes that without serious monitoring and collective action, juvenile delinquency will continue to be a problem that is detrimental to the development of society as well as human capital.

All the above studies agreed that social problems involving the youth is an old phenomenon that has reached an alarming situation, which if left unchecked will lead to more complex problems thus aggravating the situation. It is apparent that although the problem of juvenile delinquency is clearly identified as one of the major world challenges, none of these studies has suggested lasting solutions; actually some have already identified social problems as one of the complex problems for which lasting solution is almost impossible.

The Islamic approach to remedy social problems

Social problems involving the youth is a very old issue, although, much has been said, reported and published, besides huge sums of money being spent, the problem is yet to get a lasting solution. This may be partly due to the lack of a definite agreed upon definition of a social problem from an educational sociological perspective. However, even with the presence of a fixed definition, this does not suffice to guarantee a lasting solution to the Problem. Thus, Islam being a religion of fixed and an unchanging values across ages, via –axis a proper understanding of human nature can provide a lasting solution, although, this aspect is not taken serious in most cases even by the Muslims themselves.

The *Quran* and the *Sunnah* of Prophet (pbuh) are full of statement regarding this issue. Afzalur Rahman (1995) explains that, the Islamic concept of morality is based on the doctrine of *Tawhid*. Thus, Islam not only provides a normal standard but also furnishes man with a means of determining good and evil conduct, based on the concept of reward and punishment. According to Miskawaih, character is acquired and is the product of will and habituation. Emotion is a passing state of the mind, a momentary sharing of the soul, while character is a permanent disposition. Miskawaih further observes that, neither is character a faculty, because a faculty is innate, while character is acquired. Character is neither good nor bad. One who has the power and knowledge of the good has knowledge of the evil also, but he chooses one character cannot simultaneously choose the opposite. Character is the internal state of the soul, while action is its manifestation. Good actions come from good character, bad actions from bad characters, consequently, character, is primarily the object of moral judgment. Praise or blame is to be directed properly to character and not to actions. Occasional actions have little moral value

consequently they are of less significance. The actions which proceed from a character do not involve fresh thinking or deliberate choice. However, character is rooted in natural endowment (Ansari, 1964).

In the treatment of virtue Maskawaih went on to emphasize the purity of motive, according to him virtue is an end to itself, it must be sought for its own sake, and other -wise it loses its moral worth. Among the motives of virtue Miskawaih also mentions the desire for the pleasure of God (Ansari, 1986). In the conception of *sa'adah* Miskawaih notes that all activities of life find their place. In this case, the highest place is given to the activity of thought, the acquisition of Knowledge and the contemplation of the spiritual realities, particularly God. The performance of right acts or the cultivation of virtue comes next. It is an essential part of *sa'adah*, without which *sa'adah* cannot be complete. It is, however, a preparation for the higher life of contemplation compared to which it has a lower value.

Means to inculcate and maintain upright morals Clear understanding and internalization of the concept of *Tawhid*

This is the most important and fundamental teaching of Islam. The knowledge of God and his attributes aspires and guides one on the right path and removes all dubious ideas about the existence of one or many creators. (Afzalur Rahman, 1995).

Ulwan (2004) agrees with Afzalur Rahman and explicates that the child must be linked to faith education at an early age when he starts to realize the principles of faith; belief in Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, the Last Day and Predestination, then the pillars of Islam; witness to Allah's Oneness without partner and that Muhammad is the Messenger, Fasting, *Zakat* (Alm-giving), and Pilgrimage to whoever can afford it, the foundations of *Shariah*; all that is related to Islam as creed, worship, manners and rulings.

The educator adds Abdullah Nasih Ulwan must inculcate such concepts of faith and Islamic teachings into the child's soul during his early years of life, something which was highly recommended by the Prophet (pbuh) in a number of instructions;

1-Make *La Ilaha Ila Allah* the first things a child hears. Al-Hakim related that ibn Abbas said the Prophet (pbuh) said that "*make "La Illah Ila Allah" the first word that commences your children life" such that the Oneness of God is the first thing a child hears, his tongue utters and comprehends.*

2- Introduce the child to the rulings of what is lawful and unlawful such that the child grows up observing Allah's commands, keeping himself from whatever he forbade and get closely bound to the rulings of *Shariah*.

3- Commanding a child to pray at the age of seven. Abu Daud and al-Hakim related that ibn Amr al-As said that the Prophet said that *"Command your children to pray at the age of seven, and beat them for not praying at the age of ten and separate between them (males and females) in beds"*

4- Teaching the child to love Allah's Messenger (pbuh), his family and the recitation of the holy Quran. Al-Tabrani relates that Ali (ra) said that the Prophet (pbuh) said that *"habituate your children to entertain three traits; loving your Prophet, loving his family and relatives, and reciting the Quran. Surely, the bearers of the Quran are in the shadow of Allah's throne on the Day where there is no shadow but His, together with Allah's messenger and beloved ones"*

In addition to that, the children should also be taught the Battles of the Prophet (pbuh) and the history of his companion and Muslim leaders in order that they may follow the model of their ancestors.

Knowledge

Knowledge is one of the cornerstones of Ghazali's ethical system. According to al-Ghazali, morality and good conduct are not possible without it. Knowledge according to him results from the functioning of intellect or reason (*aql*) the innate rational faculty of man, which distinguishes him from animals, because it is the source of the kind of knowledge of which animals are incapable. Al-Ghazali concludes that what is really binding on man is the knowledge of achieving eternal happiness; this knowledge consists of *ilm al-Mu'amalah* which comprises both knowledge and conduct; this includes the knowledge of *ibadah* (man's relation to God), *adat* (man's relation to man) and the knowledge of good and bad qualities of the soul. In reality asserts al-Ghazali that the knowledge of these qualities alone is *fard ayn*, *ibadah* and *adat* being only means to these qualities. The knowledge of these qualities is necessary for leading one to the ultimate goal. This knowledge is the science of the various good qualities of the self like patience (*sabr*), thankfulness (*shukr*) fear (*khauf*), hope (*raja*), abstention (*zuhud*) as well as bad qualities like jealousy (*hasad*), pride (*kibr*), self-esteem (*ujb*) and *ilm a-Mukashafah*, pure knowledge, which is the end and culmination of *ilm al-Mu'amalah*, which is the highest end of man in this world (Umaruddin, 2003).

Continuous maintenance of the five canonical prayers

Canonical prayers play a significant role in the inculcation of moral and character building. Allah the Almighty states in the *Quran*. *"Recite, [O Muhammad], what has been revealed to you of the Book and establish prayer. Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing, and the remembrance of Allah is greater. And Allah knows that which you do"*. (*Quran* Surat al-Ankabut 29:45). The *Quran* again mentions that *"And seek help through patience and prayer, and indeed, it is difficult except for the humbly submissive [to Allah]"* *Quran* Surat al-Baqarah 2:45). The same was stressed by the Prophet peace be upon him in a number of his sayings; (*Musnad Ahmad*). It is reported by Termizi and Nisai that the Prophet (pbuh) said *"The first thing to be asked for on the Day of Judgment is prayer, if prayer is accepted the rest of the deeds will be accepted, if it is rejected the rest of the deed will also be rejected"* It was narrated by Ali that the last words of the Prophet said were *"prayer, prayer and what your right hand possess"* (Abu Daud).

Continuous remembrance of Allah

Remembrance of the Almighty Allah is another important aspect that has a bearing on an individual's behavior. Allah says in the *Quran*; *"Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured."* *Quran* 13:28. Consequently, anybody who does not remember the Almighty Allah, He will appoint devil as his comrade and all his activities will be influenced by it. The *Quran* states: *"And whoever is blinded from remembrance of the Most Merciful - We appoint for him a devil, and he is to him a companion."* (*Quran* Surat al-Zuhuf 43:36).

Ulwan (2004) concurs with the above verses by stressing that developing the spirit of remembrance of Allah in the children in all their conducts and circumstances is an integral element in their life, which can be achieved through training them to know that Allah the Almighty sees them and knows their secrets and what they constitute, He also knows the treacherous look of the eyes and whatever the breasts conceal.

Although the family plays a central role in moral development, it must be supported by the educators, society and the government. The education must be based on ethical principles and moral values, which are a product of deep belief and righteous religious upbringing, for a child to an innate faculty for the acceptance and pursuit of moral standards and values and noble behaviors. If the child is brought up in an atmosphere alien to Muslim tenets, void of religious orientation, then such a child becomes prone to dissolution and immorality. (Abdullah Nasih Ulwan, 2004).

CONCLUSION

Juvenile delinquency has reached an alarming state and actually it has become a global threat to the peaceful living of its inhabitant irrespective of level of development, faith and geographical location. The intensity of this problem has attracted the attention of all concerned citizens of the world laymen as well as educated; who have spent tireless efforts in understanding, identifying, and even defining social problems. Unfortunately, a decisive agreement on what it entails is yet to be reached, leaving the entire world in a state of dilemma of how to handle this menace. This study consequently is of the view that as long as the principles of faith, pillars of Islam and the foundations of *Shariah* are not given due emphasis in the curricula of Muslim educational systems, the current serious social problems involving the youth will never be solved.

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